

CHAPTER II.

Pallido, cresco, e macilente avea
 ————il viso, ————il crin—canuto.
 Sua statura a sei palmi non giungea.

ARIOSTO.

What kind should this cock come of?

As you Like it.

AMHERST had not slept long, when he was awakened by the gripe of a hand seizing upon his wrist, with a strength that effectually shackled him. He was about to make a desperate effort to deliver himself from what, in his half-waking state, he believed to be the grasp of some unknown enemy, when he perceived his terrified servant hanging over him in breathless apprehension, his knees knocking together, his eyes fixed in his head, and his teeth chattering in his jaws. He was in the act of opening his

mouth, to demand the cause of alarm, when, happening to throw a glance towards the greater chamber of the cavern, he perceived the very figure that had so strangely appeared and vanished near the fountain.

The creature, for human being it could hardly be denominated, though its dress was that of a woman, was, as far as he could judge, about three feet and a half high. Its form, indeed, appearing perhaps still more diminutive, from the vastness of the subterranean void, in the midst of which it was now seen, might have been mistaken for that of a child, had not the disproportionate size of the head, the prominence and coarseness of the features, the hollow eyes, the high cheek-bones, the thin and hooked nose, the skinny lips of its wide mouth, and the deep furrows marking its lean and leathery chops, given it a ghastly look of deformed age. The effect of this was much increased, by the grizzled hair hanging in long and numerous matted locks from under a fillet of red cloth encircling its head, and by the corpse-like paleness of its hue, rendered more fearful by the glare of the blazing wood. A garment of coarse green stuff,

having a tight boddice rising no higher than the shoulders, and leaving bare the scraggy neck, and the thin but sinewy arms, and descending loosely from the waist to about the middle of the leg, formed the whole of its drapery. As the head and countenance indicated age, so, on the other hand, the shape of the body and the bare limbs betokened extreme agility and strength of action.

Amherst at first gazed on the figure with surprise. It was busily employed in heaping up fuel on the fire, which, in consequence of its exertions, had already begun to give forth fresh volumes of flame and smoke, and whilst engaged in this occupation, he saw it lift up logs of wood, bigger than itself, with an ease that perfectly confounded him. As he looked, it went on, placing them endwise, one leaning against the other, so as to form a high pile, filling the intervals every now and then with dry brushwood, and fanning the flame energetically with a large branch of furze. All these actions were performed with inconceivable expedition, the figure wheeling round and round the pile with a rapidity almost supernatural, yet emitting no

sound, save that of a low muttered chaunting, the words of which were lost.

Amherst gazed on this singular being for a few moments. The deep sleep he had just been roused from left him for some time in doubt whether it was not a dream. At length he recovered his recollection, and being seized with an irresistible desire to satisfy his curiosity, by arresting the flight of a creature so uncouth and mysterious, he extricated himself, by one sudden exertion of all his strength, from the iron grasp of his servant's fear, and rushed forward into the main cavern. But the apparition was gone ! The noise he had made in his momentary struggle with O'Gollochar had alarmed it, and although only a few yards intervened between the spot where he had slept, and the fire where it had been busied, yet so swift were its motions, that it ran three times round the blazing pile, darted off like the bolt of death, and he only reached the centre of the cavern in time to see it vanish in the thick smoke rolling along the roof, immediately over the heaped up fragments resting against the further extremity of the vault.

Amherst stood thunder-struck for a moment. But recollecting himself, he seized upon a lighted brand from the fire, and running towards the end of the cavern where the figure had disappeared, he climbed, with some difficulty, from one immense mass of fallen rock to another, to the height of thirty or forty feet, until he had nearly reached the roof, examining every part with the greatest attention, in the hope of being enabled to account upon rational principles for its escape. But all his endeavours were fruitless. Again his wonder was renewed and redoubled, and the more he reflected on the almost inaccessible ascent the creature had scaled, as it were, with wings, the more he was perplexed.

Baffled and vexed, he sat him down on one of the stones, and was musing on the unaccountable occurrences of the evening, when his thoughts were interrupted by the noise of a desperate struggle in the sleeping place, and the half-choked voice of Cleaver. His first idea was, that his friend had been attacked, perhaps by banditti, and he rushed headlong to the recess. There all his apprehensions were not only immediately

removed, but were irresistibly converted into immoderate peals of laughter.

The Irishman had no sooner been shaken from his master, than the overwhelming dread he laboured under made him fly to the captain, who lay on his back like a great turtle, on the bed of stone he had selected, in that disturbed, though deep sort of sleep, resulting from repletion of stomach. Not contented with mere proximity, O'Gollochar griped him round the neck, and afterwards laid himself at length upon him, with all his weight, like a nightmare. But Cleaver's sleep was so profound, that although his breathing was affected almost to suffocation, he did not immediately awaken. When he was thus grappled by the terrified Cornelius, he was dreaming that his ship was sailing bravely before a gallant breeze, with every sail set, and going more knots than had ever been marked by log-line. Suddenly he felt a shock, as if the prow had struck upon some sunken sand-bank, and then she gradually went down under him. A wide ocean surrounded him, and death stared him in the face. He hastily attempted to prepare himself for swim-

ming, but he could not move a hand nor a limb, and the water rose rapidly over the sinking vessel. A huge hairy monster, half man, half fish, of tremendous strength, and with eyes like brazen censers, emerged from the sea, and grasping him about the neck, was dragging him downwards with a weight like that of ten first-rate anchors. He already felt the stifling of the waves, with all the horrors of drowning, and in utter despair of life, he struggled so desperately with the foul fiend, that he rolled O'Gollochar and himself off the bench ; when being awakened from his sleep, by the fall, but not from his dreadful dream, he began bellowing out, as well as the pressure upon his wind-pipe would permit, in notes resembling those of a half-stopped postman's horn, and at the same time buffetting with might and main the unfortunate Irishman, whose fear made him keep his hold like a bull-dog, notwithstanding the numerous thumps that rained upon him ; so that, when Amherst reached the scene of action, they were tumbling one over the other on the ground in most ludicrous conflict, the eyes of both starting from their sockets, partly from the different terrors that possessed them, and

partly from the actual strangulation they were mutually inflicting and enduring. Amherst succeeded with some difficulty in relieving them from each other's grasp, and an explanation ensued.

The sailor was astonished with his friend's story, and could hardly be persuaded that it was not an illusion, and that he had not been dreaming as well as himself.

“ Believe me, Amherst,” said he, with all that gravity the subject demanded, “ never doubt me lad, but these night-hags which have been riding us, have all been engendered by the quantity of cold food we so lately devoured, that could not choose but chill our stomachs, and cause a stagnation of the very blood in our veins. For my part, I never dream of Davy Jones but after a cold supper. Had we only had that beef-steak now I spoke of—had we, I say, had it juicy and hot, our stomachs would have been thereby cherished, and no such morbid affection, as our Doctor used to say, could have supervened. But I swear I shall make up for it at breakfast to-morrow, if there is a

decent inn to be found within the circuit of a morning's cruize."

These words were hardly spoken, when they were alarmed by the voices of men entering the outer cavern.

"These are, no doubt, the fishermen," said Amherst.

"It may be so," said Cleaver; "but look to your arms, and be on your guard, as we know not what sort of cocks the fishermen on these coasts may be."

They listened, for the speakers had not yet advanced so far as to be visible, but their conversation was carried on in a language intelligible to neither of the gentlemen. O'Gollochar, however, declared, at the first sound of it, that it was Irish, but with all that, he could make nothing out of it.

"Sure," whispered he, "isn't it mighty strange now, that it should be Irish that they are speaking, and I not comprehend a word at all that they are saying, when it is myself that not only talks it, but understands it too like a blackbird, ever sin' I was the size of a bane cod."

As the fire threw light into every nook of the

cavern, so that they could not long remain concealed, they thought it best to show themselves boldly at once. Amherst advanced with his gun in his hand, followed by his companion and O'Gollochar; and entering the grand cavern, they perceived four men, who seemed to be not a little surprised at finding the place preoccupied.

The first of these, tall, bony, and athletic, appeared to be of middle age. His air was of itself sufficient to mark him as master, even if his dress had not told the tale for him. He wore a small gold-laced cocked hat, from beneath which an enormous queue of black hair dangled between his broad shoulders. His single-breasted coat was green, and made with a low neck, large skirts, and ample sleeves, and the button-holes and pocket-covers were garnished with broad gold lace, as was also a red waistcoat, with large flaps hanging over, and half hiding his breeches. These were of doe skin, made to fit very tight, and a pair of high jack-boots, armed with silver chained spurs, with immense rowels, rose above his knees. A long cut-and-thrust sword, with a Spanish hilt and guard,

hung at his side, from a broad buff belt, passing diagonally across his breast, and under his coat; and in his hand he flourished a gold-headed cane. His neckcloth and his breast and wrist ruffles were of rich foreign lace, and his whole presence had something in it that bespoke the gentleman.

Amherst's attention was so much occupied in scanning him, that he had only leisure to remark, that his followers were dressed in the Highland garb, and that they were armed with the claymore, and with pistols stuck in their girdles.

On the sudden appearance of Amherst and his party from the recess, the leader started, and the Highlanders laid their hands on their pistols; but after surveying the two gentlemen with one comprehensive glance, he waved his hand to his followers, and gave some order in Gaelic that immediately stayed their hasty violence. He then advanced towards Amherst, with a manner partaking equally of dignity and of complaisance, seasoned with all the ease of a finished man of the world, though, at the same time, not without a tincture of suspicion.

“Your servant, gentlemen,” said he with a

bow ; “ who are you, may I make so bold as to ask ? and what do you here, in this lonely place, at such an hour ? ”

“ Perhaps,” replied Amherst, “ I ought to demand of you, Sir, by what authority I am thus questioned ; but as I have no cause for concealment of any kind, I shall not hesitate to satisfy one, who has so much the manner and outward appearance of a gentleman.” He then told him his name, and briefly added, that he and his companion were on a voyage of pleasure, and having landed in the neighbourhood, had been guided to the cavern by the light of the fire.

The stranger started involuntarily at the name of Oakenwold. He eyed Amherst keenly, and then, as if recollecting himself, he went up to him, and shaking him cordially by the hand,—

“ Sir,” said he, “ I consider our poor country of Scotland as much beholden to you and your friend, for thus deigning to visit her bleak shores ; for, dear as they are to those who have drawn their first breath of life upon them, I must admit, (Scotchman though I be,) that to a son of fertile Kent, they must appear bleak when contrasted with his native fields ; though

we, too, have our plains, and to-morrow's sun will show you one almost vying with them in richness. But in return for the politeness with which you have just condescended to answer my perhaps rather impertinent, though, when your arms are considered, somewhat excusable interrogatory, I must tell you that my name is Macgillivray; that I am proprietor of a small estate in the Highlands, some fifty miles from hence; that I am at present on a visit in this neighbourhood; and being engaged to-night in company at a public-house hard by, I walked forth to take a little of the air of this fine evening on the shore, and was, like you, led by the light to enter this cavern. I have now reason to rejoice at my good fortune for thus accidentally bringing me to form so agreeable an acquaintance."

"Public-house, did you say, Sir!" exclaimed Cleaver, whose attention having been rivetted by the word, had followed the speaker no farther,—“I think you mentioned a public-house? By Heavens, I am glad there is an inn so near. Methinks I already, by anticipation, smell some veal-cutlets done in a nice brown sauce, seasoned

with a clove of garlic, and a little mace. Pray, my dear Sir, have the goodness to order one of your people to guide us to this same hostel ; and if you will do us the favour to bestow upon us your company at supper, you will add to the obligation."

" I will do myself the honour of showing you the way thither myself, gentlemen, with the greatest pleasure," said the stranger ; " and my friends will, I am sure, thank me for presenting them with such an addition to their merry party."

So saying, he gave some orders in Gaelic to his men, who, much to the surprise of Amherst and his friend, remained in the cavern, and leading the way, he was followed by the two gentlemen and O'Gollochar.

The stranger first conducted them for a considerable way along the shore, by the foot of the cliffs, in a direction opposite to that leading to the landing-place, and then they wound up by one of those steep and narrow paths frequently found on such bold coasts, where the fishermen are compelled to avail themselves of every practicable breach in the rocky wall to make a pas-

sage to and from the sea-beach, in pursuit of their daily occupation. They then crossed the high barren downs already described, by an indistinct track, leading among the sand heaps, and they ultimately began to descend towards the more inland country, through a series of wild furzy pastures, to which some irregular patches of cultivation succeeded.

After nearly an hour's walk, their eyes were gladdened by the sight of an illuminated window at some distance, which, though consisting of four small panes of glass only, emitted blaze of light enough to have served for a beacon.

Amherst was surprised to find their walk so much longer than Mr Macgillivray had led him to expect it to be. It was too great for a mere saunter of pleasure. He could not help thinking there was something very mysterious in the whole behaviour of their new acquaintance; for although he continued to converse with fluency, and with all the urbanity he displayed when they first met him, Amherst frequently observed his keen eyes turned on him in the imperfect light of the moon, as if to scan his face and person. Nothing, however, like an apprehension of

treachery had ever crossed his mind, and, indeed, if any such had arisen there, it must have been soon dispelled by the cheering though confused sounds of merriment proceeding from the black mass before them, which, but for the flickering blaze from its little window, would never have been taken by Amherst for a human dwelling.

As they approached the hut, they began to distinguish, what might much more properly have been called the noise than the air of a rude song, supported by an occasional chorus of many voices, and as they drew nearer, their ears caught the words of the conclusion,

Then whilst we have claret,
Come, boys, do not spare it,
For wit is its produce, then drink to have fire !
See, mirth sits on ilka brow,
Who cares for care now ?

For drown'd in deep goblets the fiend must expire.
Then, hey ! come ! jolly boys, join in the carrol,
And ilka ane fill his point stoup to the nail,
Let's fill, drink and fill, till we empty the barrel,
For though it held oceans our thirst would prevail !

A Bacchanalian cheer arose as this chorus terminated, and it had just died away as Mr Mac-

gillivray ushered his new acquaintances into the public-house. But before I permit him to introduce them to the party within, I must first give the reader some idea of the interior of the place.

The house was chiefly composed of two large chambers, known in Scotland by the appellation of the *but* and the *ben*. The first of these, entering from the doorway, was used as the kitchen and hall. It had a large fire-place, with a chimney so much projected into the middle of the apartment, that a company of a dozen might have easily sat under it; and a couple of forms, placed one on each side, showed that it was frequently so occupied. The black smoky rafters were only here and there covered with bits of old boat sails, stretched across, and bent downwards between the beams, as if laden with numerous articles of lumber thrown up there to be out of the way. In other places the eye was permitted to penetrate upwards through a network of cobwebs and dust, till arrested by the interior of the thatched roof. Two or three favourite hens, at roost in the sooty regions above, seemed to sleep perfectly unconscious of the

noise below. The walls of the apartment were lined with divers cupboards, and plate-racks of different altitudes, shapes, and patterns, containing a motley assemblage of pewter and stoneware, mingled with kitchen utensils, many of them broken, and all of them dirty. Amongst other things there were a number of truncated bottles, stalkless glasses, and many pieces of cracked tea-ware of very fine foreign china, and these were intermixed with horn spoons, iron skewers, and dirty pot-lids. Long strings of fish hung drying over the fire-place, and a number of mutton hams dangled from hooks fixed in the beams, some of them so low as to make it difficult for a tall person to steer his head through them. Several large antique-looking chests, having curious dark recesses between them, where the light could hardly penetrate, a dresser, a frail table, and half a dozen wooden chairs, in the same state, formed the major part of the furniture of this chamber.

They had no sooner entered, than their ears were saluted with the sounds of discord.

“Set ye up, ye dirty baggage, to be gawin glaikin out with the fallows at this time o’ night,

an' leavin' me to be slavin' here my lane, an' sae muckle company in the house!"

Such was the exclamation of mine hostess, Mrs M'Claver, a tall, stout, good-looking, but extremely dirty woman, in a white mutch, with long black locks curling over her face and shoulders, a string of large amber beads round her neck, and clothed in a printed short-gown, covering a petticoat of red flannel, and having a pair of large well filled pockets, and a pin-cushion and pair of shears hanging by a long string at her side. In one hand she brandished an old gridiron, and in the other a dried haddock, as she stood threatening a very handsome spirited-looking wench, with trigly snooded up hair, to whom her reproof had been addressed, and who seemed just in the act of returning the first broadside of the wordy war, when its further progress was arrested by the appearance of the strangers and Macgillivray.

"Mrs M'Claver," said the latter, "you seem to be moved; pray what has bonny Peggy Galravage been doing to displease you?"

"Ou no that muckle after a'," said Mrs M'Claver, smoothing her brow with a smile, as she

eyed Amherst and his friend.—“ I was only gi'en her a wee bit o' an advice, an' ye ken it's weel my pairt, for as she's under my roof, I maun see that she behaves hersel, poor thing!—An' she's a decent lassie eneugh, after a's said.—Waes me! I hae nae dochter noo to gi'e motherly advices till! and when I had ane, gude kens, my words were but o' little profit—wha kens whare poor Eppy's wandering? or wha kens——”

But here Macgillivray, who perceived she had got hold of the thread of her endless theme, interrupted her, by introducing the two English gentlemen.

“ Proud am I, Maister Macgillivray,” said she, crossing her arms, gridiron and all, and dropping a low curtsy, “ to see siccan braw gallant gentlemen in my house. I've ay been unco fond o' the Englishers ever sin' Captain Clutterbuck lodged wi' me. He was a braw paymaster; an' mony was the braw bonny die he gied to poor Eppy. But she's awa' noo, Heaven kens whare.—I never sall forget the night——”

Here, again, Macgillivray broke in upon her

favourite topic, by asking if Sir Alisander Sanderson was still with the party?

“Ou, ay, troth is he, worthy man; he’s ower gude natured to gang awa’ and leave the honest folk. But stap this way, gentlemen, stap this way, stap yere ways ben.”

So saying, she proceeded to open the door of the inner chamber, into which Macgillivray led the way.

This apartment was of the same size as that through which they had just passed, and its fire-place, though somewhat less than the other, was of similar construction, and was filled with a blazing fire of bog-fir and peats. The walls though of sod, had been plastered inside with clay, and covered with white wash, still adhering in most places, though it had peeled off in many large patches. The rafters were partly covered with split planks, and partly, as in the other, with old sails. The whole of this patched ceiling was festooned with a perfect drapery of cobwebs and sooty filaments, drooping from every part of it. The ornaments were the sad remains of a cracked mirror, in a tarnished old carved-and-gilt frame, and a few prints, long

ago rendered unintelligible by the effects of damp. A long table formed of boards, supported upon trestles, extended down the length of the room, its surface being thickly set with stoups, or wooden drinking vessels, of a tall form, constructed of staves and hoops. Opposite to that end of it, farthest from the fire, stood an elevated gantrees, or wooden support for a cask, on which was poised a huge hogs-head of claret, reared higher than the level of the table, and having a cock and pail, that is to say, a wooden tube and plug inserted into it. The vicinity of the cask bore all the appearance of frequent applications having been made to its spiggot, and that, too, by no very steady hands, for the clay floor was moistened by frequent libations, and some of the hollows, in the inequality of its surface, stood in pools of the generous fluid.

In an old carved oak chair, ornamented with huge knobs, at the head of the table, near the cask, sat Sir Alisander Sanderson, of whom Macgillivray had spoken, a fat, ruddy, good-humoured gentleman-like person about forty, with a benevolent expression of countenance. Being

naturally indolent, and, moreover, a confirmed hypochondriac, he hardly ever left his own fire-side from one year's end to the other. To accommodate his valetudinarian whims about cold, the company subjected themselves to the risk of being melted by a tremendous fire, in addition to the naturally oppressive heat of so crowded a place. But the good gentleman was so universal a favourite, that every inconvenience was cheerfully submitted to, rather than lose the gratification of having Sir Alisander to preside over their revels. Such was the Baronet's apprehension of cold, and sifting airs, that, notwithstanding the quantum of culinary heat he was now exposed to, he sat with his great-coat on, a large flannel roller round his neck, and a red night-cap on his head, surmounted by his small gold laced cocked hat.

Next to Sir Alisander sat his shadow, Julius Cæsar Macflae, a spare figure in black velvet breeches, whose *tout ensemble* bore a strong resemblance to those *memento moris* who walk before funeral processions, known in Scotland by the name of *saulies*. His long thin neck, bound tight by a narrow white stock and buckle, show-

ed over his collarless coat like the shank of a mushroom. His head was thinly sprinkled with straggling hairs, with great difficulty collected from different quarters into a tiny pig-tail behind, so as to leave two *chevaux de frise* of bristles, rising on each side over his ears, which were so large as to resemble the orifices of two vast conchs. A toupee in front had once existed, but had long since disappeared, leaving his brow to exhibit all the effects of a West Indian sun, shaded gradually off into the polished yellow of his bald pate. His mouth was of size corresponding to that of his ears, but the smelling organ was so little developed, that it was hardly more prominent than the nose of an old-fashioned barber's block, its site being only ascertained by the appearance of two black perforations resembling nostrils. His eyebrows projected remarkably, and were so very bushy, that they seemed to have monopolized all the hair that should have adorned his head. They almost covered his eyes, which, when narrowly inspected, were of that greenish, watery, mis-shapen appearance, presented by a bursten gooseberry after rain. Notwithstanding the sounding names

of this person, he was the son of a parish schoolmaster, who, being very desirous that his boy should become a hero and a scholar, thought it prudent, on the Shandean principle, to bestow upon him *praenomina* suitable to the deeds he should one day achieve, as well as corresponding to his future literary eminence. Nor did Julius altogether baulk these fond paternal hopes, for, after having acted as tutor to Sir Alexander, he procured a situation in the West Indies, where he actually held a commission in the Kingston Volunteers, and where he, moreover, made some figure in a debating club. Having realized a little fortune, he returned to repose under his laurels, and having built a snug, upright-gabled house in his native village, he became the humble, but inseparable companion of his former pupil.

The seats in the neighbourhood of the chair were occupied by the Lairds of Blutterbog, Whinnyshaw, Blawweary, Crazletap, Windlestrawlee, and Windygoul, individuals having so little particularly striking or characteristic about them, as to require no minute delineation.

After them came Bailie Sparrowpipe the mer-

cer from the neighbouring borough, a tall, thin, spindle shanked man about forty-five or fifty; a sort of dandy of the day, with white thread stockings, large brass buckles, short-knee'd black serge breeches, yellow waiscoat, and cinnamon-coloured coat, of the old cut, pale face, and small pinking eyes, which had enough ado to see beyond a long sharp-pointed nose, and his hair peaked up in a toupee before, and tied in a silk bag behind. His body was bent forward at about half its altitude, in an angle so acute, that his nose and toes always entered a room several seconds before the rear-guard of his person. This conformation, in the opinion of many, was bestowed originally upon them by nature; but it was more generally believed, that he owed it partly, if not wholly, to the obsequious bows he made over the counter to the ladies who frequented his shop.

Next to Sparrowpipe sat Deacon M'Candy the grocer, a thick-set round-bellied vulgar little man, with a bluish red face and fiery eyes, betokening a lurking violence of temper, capable of occasionally rousing him from that natural apathy indicated by the stupidity of his countenance.

On the opposite side of the table to him sat Dr Partenclaw, who prided himself upon his vocal powers, and who had been leader of the catch. He was a little man with a large jowl, pig's eyes, red hooked nose, sack belly, spindle thighs, cased in dirty leather breeches, and limbs bound in a sort of black leather greaves, fastened with iron clasps.

Besides these, there were some inferior persons, who, as they seated themselves there for no other purpose than to assist in emptying the hogshead, to fill up the chorus of the songs, or to join in the roar or laugh, are hardly worth particularizing.